

Lithuania fears Gorbachev shift

Legation kept freedom's spirit alive

By Johanna Neuman
USA TODAY

Tourists don't crowd outside the mansion that has been home to the Lithuanian legation since 1924.

No security guards check packages and no grand protocol is needed to talk to Stasys Lozoraitis Jr., the ambassador-in-waiting whose father served as head of mission here for 45 years until his death in 1985.

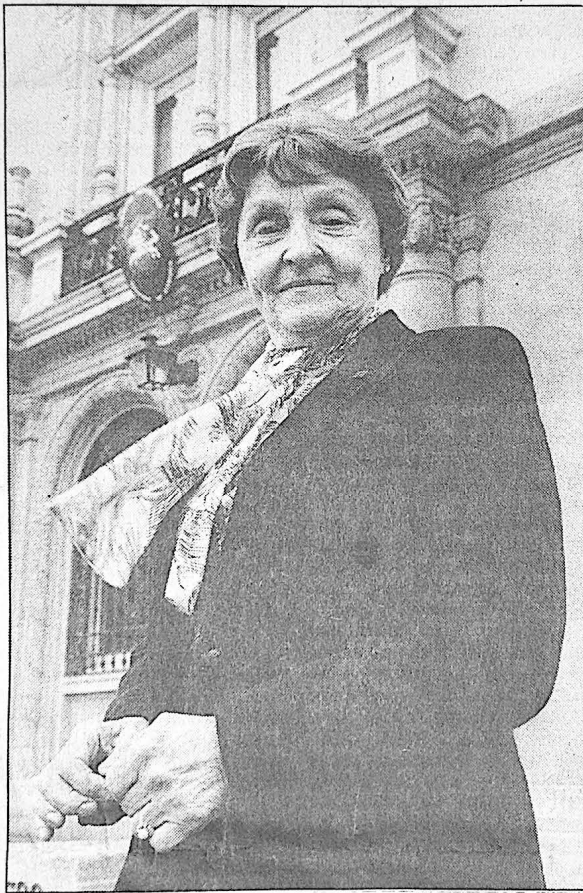
With a flag of *Lietuva* (Lithuania) hanging outside, the legation in Washington (the word embassy is reserved for sovereign countries) sits waiting — lobbying — for independence.

Margaret Samatas, raised in Lithuania, proudly shows off the mission, pointing out a large painting of Dr. Jonas Basanavicius, "our George Washington," who proclaimed Lithuania's independence in 1918.

Last weekend, from a fax machine smuggled to Lithuania by President Vytautas Landsbergis after he visited Washington last summer, the mission got a new jolt.

The Lithuanian Parliament, eyeing Soviet tanks and growing threats from Moscow, said if its government is crushed, power falls to Lozoraitis.

It was a throwback to his father's era. Days before the Soviet troops arrived in 1940, Lithuania's last free foreign minister sent word: "If catastrophe strikes, please consider



By Tim Dillon, USA TODAY

LEGATION ELATION: Margaret Samatas shows off Lithuania's legation, which represents the nation's emerging government.

Stasys Lozoraitis chief of our nation's diplomatic corps."

The elder Lozoraitis, using gold smuggled from Lithuania, ran the Washington legation, four U.S. consulates, and posts in Italy, Britain, Canada and

Venezuela.

"For 50 years," says Lozoraitis Jr., "we have carried on — working, living, dying. It is such a pity my father isn't here to see all our efforts come to such a conclusion."

By Dianne Rinehart
USA TODAY

MOSCOW — A Soviet military helicopter dropped hundreds of leaflets near the Lithuanian Parliament building in Vilnius Monday, urging Lithuanians to protest their government's push for independence.

Lithuanian President Vytautas Landsbergis said he was worried about an apparent shift in President Mikhail Gorbachev's stance toward Lithuania. The Soviet leader told visiting U.S. Sen. Ted Kennedy that military force would not be used in Lithuania — "unless lives were threatened."

The Massachusetts Democrat told a Moscow news conference that Gorbachev had said during a 1½-hour meeting that "he was committed to a peaceful resolution."

"If Mr. Gorbachev said this, then it is very dangerous," Landsbergis told National Public Radio. "Before, he always said that he would not use force in Lithuania. But now we have a situation where he's qualifying the statement and setting a condition under which he could use force."

"The only danger to the lives and health of the residents of Lithuania is the presence of Soviet army troops themselves."

Meanwhile, Soviet officers met with Lithuanian leaders in the growing war of nerves that's been escalating since Lithuania declared its independence from Moscow March 11. News reports said Soviet troops had occupied a building, the Communist Party committee's headquarters in Klaipeda, northwest of Vilnius.

Two other buildings were

taken over on Sunday.

Landsbergis said after talking with the military that the discussions would mainly function "to avoid conflict between the military and citizens."

The White House Monday opposed occupation of the buildings, but also said that so far the U.S.-Soviet June summit isn't threatened. The occupation of the buildings is "a kind of force and we're opposed to any kind of use of force," said spokesman Marlin Fitzwater.

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